

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Chicago, Illinois
April 14, 2011

Hello, everybody. Thank you. Everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. These are a bunch of old friends; we can relax. It is wonderful to be home. And I want to thank the whole crew at MK for doing just a great job. And I know everybody had a fabulous meal.

I was reminding folks that Michelle and I used to come here for dates. But now we have all these reporters come with us on dates, so it's become a little rare.

But it's wonderful to see all of you. As I look around the room, I see people who I've known for years, who supported me when nobody could pronounce my name, and so all of you are extraordinarily special. And I'm going to have a chance to travel around the room and say thank you to each of you.

There are a couple of people obviously I want to acknowledge. First of all, I'm not sure if her husband's here yet, but that doesn't matter because she is—she's one of my favorite people. Maggie Daley is in the house. So we are thrilled to have her here. Thank you. Your brother-in-law's doing okay. *[Laughter]*

Speaking of Chiefs of Staff, I am incredibly fortunate to not only have somebody now who is doing an unbelievable job and has been able to slip into what I consider to be the toughest job in Washington without missing a beat, and that's Bill Daley. But I've also benefited from a great Chief of Staff when I first got there, and he's got the best job in the world now, which is the mayor-elect, which means he doesn't actually have to do anything yet. *[Laughter]* But we love him, Rahm Emanuel.

And finally, somebody who is making really tough choices each and every day, but is guided in making those choices by great values and a knowledge and memory of where he came from and always wanting to make sure that everybody has opportunity, and that's our Governor, Pat Quinn. So, thrilled to have Patrick.

So I want to spend most of this time—this in a conversation and answering questions, and then I want to spend the rest of the time roaming around the room and kissing and hugging everybody.

We've, obviously, gone through an extraordinary 2½ years. And when Penny agreed to chair my finance committee back in 2007, part of the reason she did it is just, she likes me and Michelle. But part of it was, I think, a shared recognition that the country was at a crossroads. We had enormous challenges, and we had problems that we had been kicking down the road for years. And unless we acted decisively over the next 4 years, the next 8 years, the next 10 years, that America's greatness, its ability to respond to changing technologies, a changing economy, would be called into question.

And we weren't sure whether we were going to be able to pull it off. But what we were absolutely certain about was, there were certain core values that we cared deeply about and that we were going to fight for and try to give voice to. The idea that we are a country of individualists and freedom-loving people, folks who are self-reliant and entrepreneurial and understand that we have to earn our way. But also a country that recognizes, we're in this together and that those of us who are lucky enough to be successful want to see other people

be successful and that we want a country that is reflective of generosity and compassion and that we want every kid to be able to be a governor or the head of a big company, regardless of where they were born, and we want a country that respects everyone, regardless of their race or their gender or their sexual orientation.

And we want a country that is thinking about the future so that we are good stewards of the Earth and we are laying the foundation for economic success, not just now, but 20 years from now, and 50 years from now. And that what makes all this work is that we are committed to taking responsibility for ourselves, but also that we're responsible for something larger than ourselves.

And that has to translate itself through our Government in investments in education and investments in infrastructure and investments in science, and a willingness to make tough decisions about our budget, and willingness to make our investments in environmental protection. That all these things we do because—not out of charity—but because it makes our lives better to live in a country that is fair and just and provides an opportunity to everybody.

And so many of you became part of this campaign because you shared in those values. And we didn't fully appreciate, I think, how historic the recession would be and how precipitous some of these issues would come at us. But we understood that we were going to have to do some big things.

And over the last 2½ years, every day I've woken up remembering why we got into this thing, remembering the sacrifices and investments that all of you made, not just in me, but in this bigger idea of America. And whether it was yanking this country out of the worst recession since the Great Depression or saving an auto industry that some people had been—had written off; or making sure that our capital markets were working the way they were supposed to so that people could invest in businesses and buy homes and finance their kids to go to college; whether it was making sure that the student loan programs worked for everybody and that our kids weren't loaded up with debt; or making sure that in a country as wealthy as ours everybody had some basic health insurance and wouldn't be bankrupt or families wouldn't have to sell their homes because they've got a child with a preexisting condition; making certain that we got our troops out of Iraq and ended combat missions there, but also made sure that anybody who wanted to serve, regardless of who they loved, were able to serve; making sure that we got two more women on the United States Supreme Court and that one of them was Latina so that we could say that that institution was truly representative; making sure that we had equal pay for equal work; and making sure that we kept America secure.

And then there were pirates and pandemics and oil spills and—but through all this, every single day, what I was thinking about was how do we keep moving the country towards that vision that we collectively had: a country that's more fair, more just, provides opportunity to all people.

I couldn't be prouder of our accomplishments because of people like Rahm, because of people like Bill, because of all of you. But we've got a lot more work to do. There's so much more to do.

And every day I get letters from people all across the country, and over the last 2½ years, I can't tell you how moving and heartbreaking and inspiring these letters are: people who do everything right, work hard, look after their families, and somehow have a spell of bad luck, are sending out resume after resume, but can't find a job; kids writing, saying they think their parents are going to have to sell their home and wondering if there's something I can do to

help; families who have to drive 50 miles one way to get to their job and can't afford to buy a new hybrid and so are stuck seeing huge chunks of their income consumed by rising gas prices.

There's so much that I want to do for these folks because of that vision that we started with. We still have to have an energy policy that makes sure we're not subject to the whims of what happens on the other side of the world. We still have to have an immigration policy that's reflective of the fact that we're a nation of laws, but also a nation of immigrants.

And we're going to have a major budget debate over the next 6 months. We just passed this last year's budget, but that was just the appetizer. That was just the trial run. Because what we now have, and I spoke to this yesterday, is a very stark choice. Somebody asked, "Well, were you too tough on the Ryan plan yesterday?" I said, "That wasn't a critique, that was a description."

And I don't doubt the sincerity of those who are presenting this plan. But understand what it means. It—what it means is that our commitment to seniors fundamentally changes. And they'll get a voucher, and if they can't afford all the health insurance that—or the price of health insurance on the open market, they're going to have to make up the difference, and if they can't make up the difference, too bad. We won't have actually driven health care costs down. We will have just transferred it onto the backs of seniors and families who have disabled children and families that need help with their parents in a nursing home and can't afford it.

Under their vision, we can't invest in roads and bridges and broadband and high-speed rail. I mean, we would be a nation of potholes, and our airports would be worse than places that we thought—that we used to call the Third World, but who are now investing in infrastructure.

We would not be able to invest in basic research that helped to create the Internet and helped to create GPS and is our main comparative advantage in this 21st-century economy. We couldn't afford to tell those kids on the West Side or the South Side, if you work hard, if you study hard, if you're hitting the books, that you're going to be able to afford to go to college. We couldn't guarantee that.

And what I tried to emphasize yesterday was that's not necessary. It's not a vision that's impelled by the numbers. It's a vision that is a choice because the notion is, is that somehow those of us who have been blessed by this country, that we're just looking out for ourselves and we're not willing to make sure that that kid can go to college and we're not willing to make sure that that senior is getting decent care in their golden age—their golden years.

What is going to be valuable over the next 6 months and over the next 18 months is we are going to be able to present a very clear option to the American people. We can get our fiscal house in order, but we can do it in a way that is consistent with our values and who we are as a people. Or we can decide to shrink our vision of what America is.

And I don't believe in shrinking America. That's not who we are. That's not what made America great. That's—I don't want a smaller America for Malia and Sasha, for your kids, for your grandkids. I want a big, generous, energized, optimistic country.

That's what we're fighting for. Now, over the next 6 months, I have this day job that I've got to take care of. And so the main thing I want to emphasize tonight is remember that this is not my vision, this is your vision. This is what you fought for. This is why you invested in this campaign, not just with your money, but with your time and your energy, with your hopes. I need you to take that same kind of ownership over the next 6 months.

Your candidate is a little grayer now. And some of the excitement of something entirely new is not going to be there, and I'm—I've got some dents and dings in the fender. But that vision hasn't changed. What we care about hasn't changed. Our commitments should not have changed.

And so this campaign is not my campaign, this is your campaign. And the question is, do we finish the job? I'm prepared to finish the job. I hope you are too.

Thanks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:46 p.m. at MK restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago and his wife Maggie C. Daley; Penny S. Pritzker, chairman and founder, Pritzker Realty Group, in her former capacity as national finance chair of the President's 2008 election campaign; and Supreme Court Associate Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia M. Sotomayor. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee Fundraiser in Chicago, IL.

Locations: Chicago, IL.

Names: Daley, Maggie C.; Daley, Richard M.; Daley, William M.; Emanuel, Rahm I.; Kagan, Elena; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Pritzker, Penny S.; Quinn, Patrick J., III; Ryan, Paul D.; Sotomayor, Sonia M.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Aviation : Airport improvement projects; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Fiscal year 2011; Budget, Federal : Fiscal year 2012; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Civil rights : Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Civil rights : Racial equality; Civil rights : Wage equality; Civil rights : Women's rights and gender equality; Commerce, international : Piracy; Communications : Broadband technology; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Diseases : Global influenza outbreak; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education, Department of : Funding; Energy : Gasoline, oil, and natural gas costs; Energy : National energy policy; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Illinois : Democratic Party events; Illinois : Governor; Illinois : President's visit; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Judiciary : Supreme Court :: Associate Justice; Science and technology : Research and development; Transportation : High-speed rail lines, development and expansion; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Chief of Staff.

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